

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: “Air Force Deployment Support ”

STATEMENT OF: Ms Barbara Murray

CHIEF, FORCE SUSTAINMENT DIVISION UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

2 June 2003

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED

BY THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED FORCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

UNITED STATES SENATE

INTRODUCTION

Sen Chambliss, it is a tremendous honor to appear before you to present our Air Force family programs that aid and support our dedicated men and women of the United States Air Force and their families. While we ask much of our military members, we also ask much of their families - especially as we deploy in increasing numbers.

Today, we are facing one of our greatest challenges--how we adapt to the new steady state of accelerated operations and personnel tempo while ensuring the well being of our personnel and their families. Throughout the Air Force we have a number of programs designed to focus on the member and his/her family to enhance their overall quality of life and help them effectively confront the demands of this new AF operational imperative.

One of the largest stressors on our airman and their families is deployment. To manage our deployment schedule, the Air Force developed the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) concept which we have been refining and using since the late 90s. While world events since September 11th and, more recently, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), have forced us to deploy more personnel, the AEF construct has proved its flexibility and usefulness. Prior to 11 September, the Air Force had approximately 7000 personnel deployed; following those events, the number jumped 25,000; and then with OIF we jumped again to almost 55,000.

As we continue to track tempo, we find that there has been a significant increase in tempo levels across the force when comparing levels from FY01 to FY02. For example, on average those who were away from home station were gone 38 days in FY01 and 48 days in FY02 (21% increase). Further, in FY01 crews from only six of our 38 major weapon systems were away

from home station above 25% of their available time. In FY02 that number increased to 17.

Throughout our recent operations, the Air Force has continued to proactively manage our force deployments and the durations for each and every airman. Even so, the toll on our families has been greater than we would like. But our families are resilient, and they have come through with shining colors. Much of our success in the area of member and family support is directly attributable to the significant support we have enjoyed from Congress, especially in the FY03 NDAA. The Quality of Life (QoL) Survey 2002 indicates our members satisfaction with the Air Force has improved in large part based on the significant support from Congress.

We thank Congress for approving another significant overall pay raise to include targeting for our military personnel in the FY03 NDAA. In addition, you improved the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rates effective 1 Jan 03, based on 7.5% out-of-pocket for the National Median Housing Cost for each grade and dependency status, continuing toward our goal of eliminating out of pocket expenses. The FY03 NDAA also authorizes increases in minimum caps on health profession special and incentive pays, increases to reserve component prior service enlistment bonus amounts, and several additional travel and transportation entitlements that will continue our effort to reduce other out-of-pocket expenses for our military personnel. These critical compensation initiatives are keys to meeting our families' basic needs while improving the readiness of our force and contributes greatly to morale and retention.

The FY03 NDAA also provides many TRICARE initiatives designed to improve the quality of service for our beneficiaries. The FY03 NDAA extends TRICARE eligibility to reserve dependents residing in remote locations without their reserve sponsors. Additionally, eligibility for the TRICARE Dental Program is expanded to surviving dependents, providing much needed

dental benefits to surviving family members. It also approves the use of Medicare providers as TRICARE providers, expanding provider availability to improve beneficiary access to care.

How our airmen perceive their quality of life directly and fundamentally impacts our readiness capabilities. We place intense demands on our mission-focused Total Force, and it is imperative that we provide our airmen and their families with the quality of life they have earned and deserve. We are reviewing our manning and workload to realign resources across the Air Force to alleviate stress on our high demand assets. We seek to improve workplace environments; provide fair and competitive compensation and benefits; provide safe, affordable, and adequate housing; enhance community and family programs; improve educational opportunities; and provide quality health care, as these have a direct impact on our ability to recruit and retain our people and sustain a ready force. Again the QoL Survey supports this by showing our Airmen and AF civilians believe by over 90% that the Air Force is a good place to work. The survey also reflects families being over 80% supportive of the AF way of life. We will not stop looking for ways to improve, however we are happy to report the efforts on behalf of our AF personnel have made significant impact on our Airmen and their families.

More specifically, as we look at deployment issues/concerns, we are pleased with the tremendous advancements we have made over the last decade in caring for our members and their families. As early as 1995, the Air Force placed Readiness NCOs in each of our Family Support Centers (FSC). Those NCOs are charged to take care of family issues during deployments, plane mishaps, and natural disasters. They have become one of our best success stories as they link leadership, members, families and community agencies -- maximizing resources to effectively handle the stresses of deployment and/or reunions. The Readiness NCO prepares, sustains and reunites members and families so they are able to meet today's mission

requirements.

FSC Readiness NCO's are tasked with providing individual and family counseling prior to the deployment, to include administration of a pre-separation checklist of practical considerations. While this counseling is highly encouraged, the current AF Instruction does not make it mandatory for military personnel. Some installations require members to process through the FSC prior to deployment, but family counseling is not mandatory. Unit briefings are held at the discretion of commanders and are, in most cases, mandatory for the deploying military member. These briefings involve subject matter experts (including the FSC Readiness NCO) and cover family considerations, socio-political demographics at the deployment site, Chaplains' briefings, pay and entitlements, medical and legal concerns. Many FSC Readiness personnel occupy a formal position on the mobility processing line and, while this presence is an optional stop, most personnel stop to get support information for their families, pick up self-help booklets for children and spouses and register for free morale calls. At one Air Force Material Command installation, the FSC stop was combined with the Emergency Data (Form 93) stop. As members check their data, they can easily access FSC information as well. Air Force Reserve Command developed a standardized form to be filled out by the member at the deployment line. The purpose is to capture unique concerns just prior to the member's departure. The information cannot be captured at any other time and provides the member one last opportunity to share concerns about special family care needs (e.g. "my son and spouse were in a car accident a few days ago. They are fine but I would feel better if someone would call them and check on them.") It is the individual attention the Readiness NCO provides to the member and family that has truly made the difference for our families.

Following the departure of the military member, the FSC and the Readiness NCO continue their engagement with the immediate family and, in many cases, the caregivers of a single airman's children or a single member's family of origin. Support is provided in the form of morale calls, video phone calls, Hearts Apart support activities, free email via GI Mail, individual adaptation consultations, referral and follow up and access to AF's community website, AFCrossroads. Many installations publish newsletters that describe community activities, classes, volunteer opportunities, deployment "survival" tips and "need to know" information. Chaplains, FSC's, unit leaders, spouses and base agencies contribute to these newsletters or create base web pages for separated families. The VFW held a school supplies drive for the 1,300 Air Force families who were evacuated from Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Of those families, 12 chose to go to Robins Air Force Base, 5 chose to go to Dobbins Air Reserve Base and 7 to Moody Air Force Base. They didn't have time to pack their personal items, said John Senk, the VFW adjutant general. This is one reason the organization collected the supplies. The VFW also provides free phone cards to deployed members and their families, and emergency relief funds to those who need it. The school supplies were sent to stateside Air Force family support centers and distributed to the families. Some of those supplies arrived in Georgia to support the families there in Safe Haven status from Turkey.

The military member's return is often the toughest part of a deployment. The member has to reenter the family, the work place and get back to day-to-day obligations. The FSC and the Readiness NCO work hand-in-hand with the unit prior to the members return. All helping agencies participate in the successful reintegration of the member and the family. It is a community interest to support our members and families reunite and return to a balance between work and family. The Chaplains are an integral part of reuniting the unit members with their

families by providing reunion counseling/briefings at the deployed locations.

Another tremendous success for the Air Force has been AFCrossroads, our official family and community website. The website offers information on each DoD installation, employment opportunities, information resource center, teens and youth forum, Eldercare, Family Separations and related website links to provide additional information to the AF family. Just to show how truly successful this web site is, we recorded over 24M hits for the month of April 2003 alone! The virtual community that has developed as a result of this website is now extending back to our physical communities where spouses, armed with the information they have shared/received via AFCrossroads, are energizing all types of programs/services at their base that only further respond to installation family needs.

Taking a more collaborative approach to community and family service delivery, we created the Community Action Information Board and Integrated Delivery System working groups at Air Staff, MAJCOM, and Installation levels. The Community Action Information Board brings together senior leaders to review and resolve individual, family and installation community issues that impact military readiness and quality of life. The Integrated Delivery System working group brings together all community and family agencies to ensure our military members and their families have access to the services and activities they need. Through robust research over the last decade, we know that communities that are the most equipped to respond positively to the unique demands of deployments are those communities where there is a shared competency among not just leadership and the formal agencies, but also among members of the informal networks. While we have historically focused our attention on strong leadership support and the excellences of formal agencies, we now know that the first place people seek

help is from friends and family members -- by a resounding majority. With that documented preference, we have begun to focus our efforts much more heavily on strengthen the collective competency of our informal networks, building a shared sense of social responsibility, and ensuring that members of those informal networks have the resources to effectively respond to their own issues/needs. Nowhere have we seen the effects of that change more notably than in our suicides rates which have dropped dramatically over the last 7 years. Another resounding success in building community is a virtual community created via a spouse forum on AFCrossroads. Since its debut, we have seen a community of spouses form that exchanges encouragement, advice, and information with each other on a daily basis. With the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the conversations turned to deployment needs and support. Subsequently we now see conversation addressing how to handle situations around reunions.

Programs like child development and youth programs are absolutely critical to readiness and family well-being. Troops who know their family is being properly cared for are better able to focus on the mission and deliver top results. The Air Force sets the standard in providing affordable, quality child-care in child development centers, school age programs, and family child-care homes. Air Force childcare centers and all of its before- and after-school programs for children 6-12 are 100% accredited. Over the last 2 years, the Air Force expanded its family child-care program so it can offer free emergency child-care for its members who have to work late, on the weekends, or who experience shift changes. This program also serves parents who are assigned to missile sites and need around-the-clock care. The most recent variation of this program, spurred by Operation Enduring Freedom, provides 16 hours of free child-care for members who are returning home after an extended TDY. Beyond these benefits, on-base

programs are part of the non-pay benefit system providing savings over the cost members would pay to receive similar services off base.

Across the Air Force, Services Squadron Family Member Support Flights actively support our deployed members and their families. For example, at Robins AFB, when Major General Wetekam, Warner Robins Air Logistics Center Commander, held two briefings for spouses of deployed members, on-site childcare was provided while he relayed vital deployment information. Functional experts from Family Member Programs, Family Support, the Chapel, Medical Group, Legal, the Housing Office, and the base school attended and shared the programs offered to assist families left behind.

Our extended partnerships with Air Force Aid Society (AFAS) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) have allowed us to even further extend our support to our Airmen and their families. Gen Hap Arnold & his wife Bea started the AF Aid Society during WW II (1942) for the purpose of taking care of Army Air Corps members & their families. So we have a proud 61-year history of providing this support during all combat operations that have occurred since our founding. As the United States prepared to engage in the war with Iraq, while continuing to fight the War on Terrorism & defending the homeland, Gen Mike McGinty re-emphasized to our Family Centers the commitment of AFAS to help our great AF troops (Active, Guard & Reserve) and their families. Stating that they know what combat creates unique problems, concerns, stresses and worries, they committed the AFAS to help wherever & however they could. They repeatedly stepped in to respond to special cases and considered every request.

Although our members are required to have a Family Care Plan, there are still times when a plan

falls through by no fault of the member. In response to that need we have established a partnership with the VFW National Children's Home. The VFW National Children's Home is located in Michigan and will open its doors to military children who require a home due to a parent's deployment. The home is stretched out over 660 acres and has served VFW children since 1925. The National Home is truly a home for children and provides a positive, safe and community centered approach to raising children. The children I met on my most recent visit are confident, self assured and focused on a bright future. It is a good match for our Air Force children and the VFW.

Summary

The Global War on Terrorism has imposed a new steady state of radically accelerated operations and personnel tempo as well as a demand for unprecedented speed, agility, and innovation in adapting to unconventional and unexpected threats. While our tools and technology are impressive, it is our airmen who will fight and win the nation's wars. Moreover, while they do that, it is incumbent upon us to care for them and for their families. We will continue to rely on Congress as we seek to improve and innovate our support mechanisms to meet the challenges of our "new steady state." Thank You.